It's Shriver 42, Agnew 41, for Top Job

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In the past few years mention of Spiro Agnew's name to voters across the country invariably drew a common reaction. People would laugh. Then they would go on to mention such things as golf balls, comic watches or offer stronger and generally unfavorable remarks.

There is less laughter about Agnew today. He is viewed with more mixed feelings, and even a new measure of respect. But the voters interviewed for these articles are firmly of the opinion today that the Vice President would not make a good President.

Although our voters favor Richard Nixon by a 59-31 per cent margin, those same citizens overwhelmingly give Agnew a negative rating. When asked whether Agnew would make a good President, 57 per cent of all voters said no. Only 27 per cent said yes. The rest had no opinion.

Agnew also trails behind the Democratic vice presidential nominee, Sargent Shriver, when the voters are asked to choose between the two men.

If the presidential choice this year were limited to Agnew and Shriver, 42 per cent of all voters said they preferred Shriver to the 41 per cent favoring Agnew.

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The voters' unflattering feelings about Agnew are shown more sharply when you look at the various elements of the electorate. Not a single voter category—including registered Republicans and those calling themselves conservatives—thinks Agnew would make a good President.

Here is the breakdown.

Only 39 per cent of Nixon voters believe the President's running mate would be a good chief executive. With one exception—those 50 years and older—the voters view Agnew more critically.

The percentages of the various groups who think he would make a good President show: only 8 per cent of McGovern voters; 25 per cent of the Democrats; 36 per cent of the Republicans; 22 per cent of the independents; 15 per cent of the liberals; 38 per cent of the conservatives; 26 per cent of the moderates; 30 per cent of the men; 24 per cent of the women; 32 per cent of the blue-collar workers; 7 per cent of young voters between the ages of 18 and 24; and 41 per cent of those over the age of 50.

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The problem with Agnew, in the voters' minds, is that he is still too blunt, too divisive, too controversial to govern the country. In this perception, Agnew is regarded much like George Wallace. Wallace, too, gets credit for being outspoken, for having the courage to say what he really thinks, for being independent and for the little man. But like Agnew, he is not generally thought of as being presidential.

Meet, for example, Jan Wieckowski. He's the kind of man that both Wallace and Agnew appeal to: strong for law and order; strong for greater authority in the government. He's also a Nixon voter of four years ago who is staying with the President.

Wieckowski, who came to America 12 years ago from Poland and is now in his early 40s, was waxing his car on a warm, sunny day in South Boston. Although he was saying he still planned to vote for Mr. Nixon, his real favorite this year had been Wallace.

"I'd vote for him, believe me," he said. "George Wallace, he would keep the good order in the country."

But when he was asked about Agnew, Wieckowski paused before answering. "He's like a king," he finally said. "He's something like the people from Europe. Heavy hands. Hard discipline. But for the American style, no. He's not good."

Wieckowski thinks Agnew would make a bad President. He definitely prefers Shriver over the Vice President.

Other voters express their disapproval differently.

"Agnew wouldn't make no President," said a retired druggist outside of Houston, Tex., who is a straight Republican voter, and plans to vote for the Nixon-Agnew ticket again. "He's too radical. He's a good man to work with Nixon, but everytime he gets up he puts his foot in it. The best thing Agnew has done is putting Kennedy in his place, but he wouldn't make a good President. He pops off when he shouldn't."

Another Texas voter, who backed Wallace four years ago and has now switched to Nixon, interestingly compares Agnew to George McGovern. Agnew, too, would "have problems gaining the confidence of the people."

He added:

"Agnew's not diplomatic enough. He'd be fighting with people rather than accomplishing anything."

In Emsworth, Pa., another Nixon voter, a mailman by occupation, dislikes Agnew for a different reason.

"He gets radical with young kids," this man commented. "He should listen to them more often."

In neighboring Duquesne, a steelworker was asked about Agnew. He smiled, and said: "He sure is changing. He's an attractive man with a nice looking family but I think we better look elsewhere for a presidential candidate. Agnew would be another Goldwater."

His Goldwater analogy was voiced by a New Jersey citizen, who said simply of Agnew: "He might push the wrong button."

Clearly, Agnew's role as the cutting edge of the Republican Party has hurt him. Among his admirers, it's not unusual to find voters who express sympathy for him, and a form of disapproval for the role in which they think the President has cast him.

"I think Agnew's more intelligent than the speeches he gives indicate," said a Pennsylvania housewife. "I think he's a very stable individual

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based on his work as governor of Maryland. I think he's saying what Nixon said when he lost the governorship of California.

"Nixon can't afford to get mad any more and sling mud, so he has Agnew do it for him."

And in Los Angeles, a young salesman put it this way:

"He's very outspoken. Most of the things I agree with him. It was wrong for the Republicans to make him the clown, the fool."

Of course; Agnew does have his loyal band of supporters. They tend to be as strong for Agnew as the Wallace voters were for the Alabama governor. As a group, they are conservative and often express their admiration for Agnew in patriotic terms.

A woman in Clawson, Mich., praised Agnew for "speaking out" and "saying what he thinks." Then she said: "He says a lot what the comman man thinks. We're not a perfect country, but we're the best there is. I respect my flag and Agnew reflects that feeling."

Not surprisingly, Agnew's supporters are most vocal in the South. As George Lardner of The Post reports, from Florida:

"Spiro Agnew is a big man down South. Several people said they like him better than Nixon; like Wallace, Agnew speaks his mind. In Florida, anti-Kennedy feeling continues to be strong. John Kennedy didn't carry Florida in 1960 and I doubt that Ted Kennedy could in '76.

"And when you ask voters here about Sargent Shriver, the ones I talked with would reply, 'Kennedy kin' —as though that were enough to dismiss him forever."

Lardner's point about Shriver is true not only in the South. Everywhere we went the answers about Shriver are sharply contrasted.

A Shriver fan club does exist. It includes the kinds of people who will say, "Oh, yes, he is good; that's the kind of man we need; he'd make a fine President." We met voters who think ver the best of all the candidates all.

t the negative responses are also gly expressed. Invariably, they interwined with what a person s of the Kennedys.

hriver's strong public identification the Kennedys is thus a mixed sing for him politically. For those admire the Kennedys, his relation- with the family is often enough to Shriver the highest respect. For rs, perhaps more numerous, the nnedy ties are enough to discredit . That's what's wrong with him, se people will say.

hriver does have more positive as- iations than merely his family back- ound. Those who like him, speak fa- rably of his work with the Peace rps—but, interestingly, almost never th the war on poverty—and his role a diplomat. They think of him as dy- mic, personable, attractive.

Patti Orr, a 22-year-old teacher in exas, was typical. She likes Shriver's nile, his energy, his Peace Corps ackground. She also likes him for aving his 92-year-old mother beside m when he made his nationally tele- sed vice presidential acceptance eech.

"He knows how to talk to people," rs. Orr says.

While she would vote for Shriver ver Agnew, she is nevertheless sup- orting Mr. Nixon over McGovern.

Because of all the emotional under- rrents surrounding the McGovern- om Eagleton incident, it is hard to dge the public feeling about Shriver, e candidate. But Shriver does come ff well by comparison.

Of all our voters, 37 per cent thought Shriver was a better choice for the Democrats than the 35 per cent who said he wasn't. Among both McGovern voters and Democrats, he fared even better.

By 49-to-28-per cent, all our McGovern voters said Shriver was a better choice for the Democrats than Eagleton. Among Democratic voters, Shriver again came out on top by 39 to 33 per cent.

Indeed, we encountered voters who say Shriver's presence on the ticket has been decisive in convincing them to vote for McGovern. JoAnne Joe, 22, a student in Los Angeles, was one of these.

"Wallace was my first choice," she said. "I didn't like Humphrey or Muskie, and I vacillated on McGovern. I guess it was really a process of elmination. When Wallace was shot I was debating on whether to vote at all.

"I decided on McGovern when he chose Shriver. I kind of mistrust McGovern, but Shriver lends him some stability. Why Shriver? Well, I really wanted to see Ted Kennedy run, even over Wallace. I guess it's just because of JFK and RFK."

As we have said, Shriver led Agnew by 1 percentage point in a head-to-head match.

Considering that the great majority of all voters preferred the President to McGovern at the time we conducted our survey, Sargent Shriver's presence on the ticket certainly has not hurt the Democrats.

He offers another contrasting personality to the public in a year when personal impressions, rather than a serious discussion of the issues, seem to appeal most to a politically-weary nation.

NEXT: The Issues.

These articles are based on interviews with 443 registered voters in 50 precincts of the 10 largest states. The interviewing was done during September by the following members of The Washington Post staff who did their field work in these states: Massachusetts—David S. Broder and Haynes Johnson; New York—Broder, Johnson, Anthony Astrachan and Stephen Isaacs; New Jersey — Astrachan; Pennsylvania — Broder and Mary Russell; Ohio—Johnson; Michigan—Russell; Illinois —William Chapman; Florida—George Lardner Jr.; Texas—Broder; California—Johnson and Leroy F. Aarons. Their findings are not intended as a prediction of the Nov. 7 presidential election.

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